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作为文化资源的中国传统哲学以现代中国商业领导力

**Chinese traditional Leadership Philosophy as cultural resource for Chinese Business Leadership**

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## 摘要

### 作为文化资源的中国传统哲学以现代中国商业领导力

研究人员、教育人员和实践人员都了解目前缺乏同有效的中国商业领导力开发相关的针对性文化项目，中国的现代管理教育仍然是“原样照搬”西方的项目。由此所导致的新一代中国管理人员的低效发展在人力资源发展和企业战略发展领域产生了大量的问题，并影响了中国企业的效率。

本论文《作为文化资源的中国传统哲学以现代中国商业领导力》揭示了中国传统哲学作为文化源是如何推动有效商业领导力的发展的。由于中国人对于传统价值观的坚守，中国传统领导哲学可以成为一个有效的商务领导力概念。此外，本论文还具体介绍了如何在不同类型的中国商业机构中应用孔子、老子、孙子和韩非子等不同学派的思想以确保实现有效领导。

为此，我们针对七家公司中的 125 名中国雇员（中层管理人员和普通雇员）进行了一项调查，这些公司代表了中国的三种主要企业形式，即国有企业、跨国公司和私营企业。调查的第一部分分析了被调查者的一般价值观，从文化角度证明了开展进一步的领导力相关调查工作的适当性。调查的第二部分从文化角度对被调查者所能接受的领导理论进行了研究，该理论决定了对有效商业领导力的要求。

定量和定性研究结果显示，被调查者将有效领导定义为管理情绪的能力，能够促使下属努力实现目标并提升自我能力，推动企业和谐发展，听取各方意见，作出慎重判断，并最终让整个团队为了实现集体目标而共同奋斗。这要求领导者要心胸宽广具有包容性，能够提供有影响力和指导性的指示。

根据上述调查结果，本论文介绍了古代哲学家所提倡的传统领导哲学，并说明其可以成为开发现代商业领导力的合适概念，因为这些思想不仅仅影响了人们的一般价值观，而且对中国社会的领导力理论产生了深刻而持久的影响。

最后，本论文介绍了如何在不同类型的中国机构中采用传统领导哲学以促进有效商业领导力的发展。

将原始哲学领导力思想作为广义的文化源，为中国的现代管理教育和领导力实践者提供合适的参考材料。对传统思想的现代解读能够满足人们当前和未来的需求，并进而确保商业领导力概念的有效性。

其它国家对领导力发展课题感兴趣的人也可以应用本研究的结果来提升其对中国领导力要求的理解，进而了解中国对有效商业领导力的具体要求。

**关键词：**中国文化、中国传统领导哲学、有效商业领导力开发

## **Abstract**

### **Chinese traditional Leadership Philosophy as cultural resource for Chinese Business Leadership**

Although researchers, educators and practitioners alike are aware of the lack of cultural suitable programs for the development of effective Chinese business leadership, the modern management education in China is still “importing” Western programs. The thereby caused ineffective development of the new generation of Chinese managers generates a wide range of problems within the human resources development and strategic management and influences the productivity of China’s companies disadvantageous.

The presented paper “Chinese traditional Leadership Philosophy as cultural resource for Chinese Business Leadership” shows that the Chinese traditional Philosophy serves as cultural resource for developing effective business leadership. Because of the still present traditional value orientation among the people Chinese traditional Leadership Philosophy can be applied as an effective Business Leadership concept. Furthermore the thesis gives a practical suggestion about how the different thoughts of Confucius (孔子), Laozi (老子), Sunzi (孙子) and Hanfeizi (韩非子) can be applied within the different types of business organizations in China to ensure an effective leadership practice.

For this attempt, a survey has been operated which consulted 125 Chinese employees (middle managers and subordinates) within seven companies, representing the three main forms of Chinese companies, namely the State Owned Enterprises (SOE), Multinational Organizations (MNO) and Family Owned Enterprises (FOE). The first part of the survey has analyzed the general value orientation of the spot group in order to attest the cultural appropriateness for further leadership related investigation. The second part of the survey has studied the cultural-

ly endorsed leadership theory of the participants which determines the requirements for effective business leadership.

The quantitative and qualitative research has figured out, that the polled representative group, defines effective leadership as the ability of managing emotions, allowing people to pursue their dreams and improve themselves, promoting harmony, listen to both sides and judge with discretion and finally unifying the group respectively the group goals. This requires an influential and guiding leadership practice which needs a leader who has a big heart.

Based on these findings the paper introduces the traditional Leadership Philosophies of the ancient philosophers as a suitable concept to develop modern Business Leadership, because their thoughts have influenced not only the general value orientation but also the leadership theory of Chinese society in a penetrating and persisting way.

Finally a concept is presented to show how the traditional Leadership Philosophy can be applied within the different types of organizations of Chinese economy in order to foster the development of effective Business Leadership.

The application of the original philosophical leadership quotations as a comprehensive cultural resource provides suitable material for the modern management education and leadership practitioners in China. The modern interpretation of the traditional resources allows the involvement of contemporary and future needs of the people and therefore ensures effectiveness of the Business Leadership concept.

Interested people of leadership development from other countries also can apply the findings of this research in order to enhance their understanding for Chinese leadership requirements and therefore get an idea how business leadership in China should look like in order to be effective.

**Keywords:** Chinese Culture, Chinese traditional Leadership Philosophy, effective Business Leadership development

## Preface

Sometimes many question marks popped up in my mind during the time I have been living in Xiamen (China), caused by the lack to understand the people's "strange" behavior – compared to my German understanding.

After I had started my studies of Chinese Philosophy, History, Anthropology, Literature and Mandarin in the international Master program "Chinese Philosophy" of Xiamen University, many things, happening within my daily life, were becoming clearer. Especially studying the ancient thoughts of the great Masters Confucius (孔子), Mencius (孟子), Laozi(老子), Zhuangzi(庄子) and Hanfeizi(韩非子) has helped me a lot to discover the origin of the Chinese Culture and therefore the behavior of the Chinese.

Sensitized through my study of Management Science in Germany and my personal interest for Leadership studies, I have recognized that the wise Philosophers have left a comprehensive concept of Leadership because most of their thoughts deal with the issue how to lead people effectively in order to establish a harmonious society.

After intensive research I found out, that China's Management Education is importing the concepts of Western Leadership development thus fails to develop a culturally suitable and therefore effective concept for Chinese Business Leadership. My personal interest for the question "how Chinese ancient Philosophy could be applied for modern business leadership development?" has motivated my personal exploratory spirit for further investigation.

Through nice friends and a reliable network of supportive relationships here in Xiamen I had the chance to involve many Chinese people of different companies, who are interested in this topic, to get useful input for my Master thesis.

Many THANKS to all who have contributed to a very interesting time of research and my successful investigation which was needed for this paper. Also thank you to my family, my husband Udo and our daughter Betty who have patiently endured my intensive time of study.

I hope that China will use its unique and precious source of wise Philosophy to develop its own concept for effective Business Leadership. The people should be proud of their Culture without being closed toward foreign thoughts. For a sustainable and effective development the



consideration about “what can we use from the past? What should we keep? What should be changed?” can be a helpful approach that requires an intensive study of the rich source of traditional Philosophy and the needs of the people in contemporary and future times.

For this attempt, the paper “Chinese traditional Leadership Philosophy as cultural resource for Chinese Business Leadership”, written in order to finish my Master program in Chinese Philosophy at Xiamen University, should provide a useful input. But also non-Chinese managers who are interested in the Chinese Culture will find some useful information about the way to lead Chinese people in the business environment effectively.

Katja Supp-Zesewitz  
Xiamen in April 2016

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## Introduction

During the 1960s and 1970s the authoritarian government of China invested heavily in physical and human capital in order to maintain and accelerate China's industrialization. Thereby it realized a centrally planned and commanded economy in which 75% of China's overall industrial production was centrally controlled and state-owned – steered through centrally planned output targets, managed through governmental controlled prices and allocated resources.<sup>1</sup>

By the in 1979 initiated economic reforms, economic policymaking was decentralized in several sectors, enterprises were allowed to operate and compete on free market principles. Under the control of provincial and local governments the population, dominated by agriculture, was encouraged to start own businesses and China's participation at the global economy has increased gradually.<sup>2</sup>

Later on, in 1997, the Congress of the People's Republic of China legalized the development of private enterprises by reducing the legal barriers, so the number of private enterprises has grown rapidly. Through the realization of these large-scale reforms most of the former collective enterprises have been privatized.<sup>3</sup> In a next step, the government initiated investments in foreign firms to realize the obtaining of technology and management skills in order to develop globally competitive Chinese companies.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the “Middle Empire” (Zhong guo 中国) has grown up to a major global economic power meanwhile, the development of leadership for the world's largest economy “*is one of the greatest challenges facing all types of Chinese organizations*”.<sup>5</sup> While most of China's companies have increased the budgets for leadership development, China's business has to face the problem of an enormous gap in its leadership, not only in a quantitative but also in a qualitative manner.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Morrison (2015), p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Morrison (2015), p. 4

<sup>3</sup> Zhu (2012), p. 117

<sup>4</sup> Wang (2015), p. 2; Morrison (2015), p. 17

<sup>5</sup> Korn (2015), p. 1-2

<sup>6</sup> Morrison (2015), p. 1

Supported by the findings of the online survey by Hewitt Associates, Frank T. Gallo testifies the programs for leadership development of the majority of China's companies as "ineffective"<sup>7</sup>, because China's leadership education does not do the right thing.

Both, Chinese scholars and scholars from Western countries state that the vast amount of leadership development programs and literature, mainly imported from Western institutions, cannot provide a satisfying model for the Chinese context.

Lau and Roffey who published their research about "Management education and development in China" in 2002 state, that the highly demanded Western MBA (Master of Business Administration) is an inadequate concept for addressing the values, needs and also the expectations regarding effective leadership in China's business environment.<sup>8</sup>

Summarizing the results of numerous studies investigating leadership effectiveness it can be stated, that an universal Leadership model is inadequate in addressing the culturally endorsed needs and expectations regarding effective Business Leadership. An effective model for developing Business Leadership must be based on cultural patterns which have been formed through the individual history of a society.<sup>9</sup>

Already in 1991 the Taiwanese scholar Professor Cheng Zhongying (成中英) has introduced his „C-theory“, in that „C“ stands for the "Creativity of Change". The theory attempt to combine Western scientific culture with Chinese culture in order to foster a sustainable concept which supports the process of transition from China's planned economy to market economy. He suggests the application of rational Western management models as "Yang" and the Chinese model of leadership as "Yin" in order to incorporate the social coordination which is missing in the Western models. By this approach a cultural suitable concept can be created which is modeled according to the Philosophy of Change which built up the common basis of the numerous thoughts of Chinese traditional Philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Being aware for the need to develop "soft" leadership skills that help to deal with people as important factors for leading people effectively, the dean of Tsinghua University's School of Economics and Management had decided to change the "hard" skill oriented Management Education in 2008. In an interview with the author of "McKinsey daily July 2013" dean Qian

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<sup>7</sup> Gallo (2011), p. 20

<sup>8</sup> Lau, Roffey (2002), p. 6

<sup>9</sup> McElhatton, Jackson (2012), p. 4; Lau, Roffey (2002), p. 3-6

<sup>10</sup> Lowe (2003), p. 35



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